136

out chunks of flesh, and can even [180] be of some slim service, similar to that which is told concerning that fellow in the "Ricciardetto." It is an ovoid, laterally flattened fish. The ray is round, vertically flattened and has three barbs on its tail. It can make a very painful and dangerous wound with the middle barb when the fish is stepped on and lashes out with its tail. Some grow to be over a meter in diameter. It lies on the bottom of quiet pools, as close as it can to the bank; it would seem to be viviparous. The yacaré, a kind of crocodile, will without warning bite the leg or arm of an unfortunate father, drag him to the bottom and there devour him.

So it is that bathing, which was so necessary to cool ourselves off in the suffocating heat, was always embittered by the presence of these maneaters.

The married woman is faithful to her husband by inclination, 837
education and fear. There are tales of terrible revenges wreaked by husbands upon their unfaithful wives, over whom they have power of life and death. While they are single they can be and often are free in their ways. It cannot be doubted that the whites attract their inter- 609
est, if matters of racial difference do not intervene, for the poorest white is always in a position to give better presents than is the richest chief.

These women love decorations and clothing, but have no use for 291
skirts or corsets. They wrap themselves from the waist down in a blanket, and hold it up with a belt or cord which is hidden behind the fold of cloth. In addition to this they know how to distribute these rags in such a way as to accentuate their good figure and yet at the same time not encumber themselves, a skill not to be expected on first seeing them. Their dress consists of robes, and when they have any they put them all on, be it winter or summer, partly because of the nomadic existence they lead and partly because they like to do so. One might say that the saying: what wards off cold also wards off heat, is particularly applicable to them.

Both men and women love bright colors (particularly red) and [822]
variety, but they also like white cloth. When they put on any garment they always do so in such a way as to leave one arm free. The women have a high regard for the kind of shirts which we wear.

The women make their own ornaments out of leather and broken 301
shells, achieving a certain elegance of form, though with a greater 291
or lesser degree of rusticity. They wear, from childhood, a sort of

5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7

837 within a marriage, distinction is made between the unfaithfulness of a man and of a woman, the latter's being considered the more serious offence. If a man commits adultery it is often said that a young girl has intervened. In that case the wife—when she realizes what is going on—with some of her female relatives, attacks the girl. For this reason, in earlier days particularly, girls never cut their [302] nails in order that they could draw blood from any rival. It is noteworthy that whereas the wife obtains the help of her female relations, the same is not so in [602] the case of the intervening girl. Her family maintains "that it is not worth fighting about", but in view of the absolute solidarity that is customary within families, it must mean that her conduct is regarded as positively wrong, by her own kin, that is to say, socially.

In the event that a man should have fled with the intervener, the wife and her female relatives pursue them and attempt by force to drag back the man. As a rule they are successfull in this, because the other men will not concern themselves about it, considering it a purely feminine affair. When a man is unfaithful 684 and is regarded as the active party, he also risks being beaten to his senses by his wife and her female relatives. On one occasion I saw a young man beaten black and blue and thrown out of his house. He had had relations in the forest with a girl, and had been seen by another woman who told his wife of it. When the man returned home and had lain down to sleep he was beaten almost unconscious by his wife, her sister, and a third woman in order to teach him to behave better. No one in the village wished to intervene. A man who persists in infidelity will be [586] reproached, even by his own relations, and his wife has the right to leave him without incurring censure.

As a rule a woman's unfaithfulness will have more far-reaching results than that of a man. In the first place the husband does not trouble to consider whether the wife is the seducer or the seduced, but always gives her the blame. Her fate depends upon the temperament of her husband. If he discovers her, he can beat her in order that her behaviour shall be improved, and in that event he seldom does anything to his rival. As a rule, however, he will at once divorce her and [586] chase her away. Her family will make no protest, and will at most vilify her for having behaved badly. It is said that the reason why a man wants to be divorced at once is because he thinks that she will be unfaithful to him again and again, so that at last he will lose his head and attempt to kill her and her lover. There are 628 numerous examples of this: the wife will perhaps fly with her lover to another 682 village, but the husband will follow them, concealing himself until the evening dance begins. He will then steal into the chain of dancers and wait for a good opportunity—a pause in the dance—when he can kill first his rival and then his wife whilst they are together. He flees back to his family under cover of darkness, but will seldom be pursued because the village will wait until the morning to find the killer's tracks and thus identify him. Every Mataco knows the footprints [822] of all his village fellows, and often many more. A member of the dead man's